

Free - Take One



Shaqah

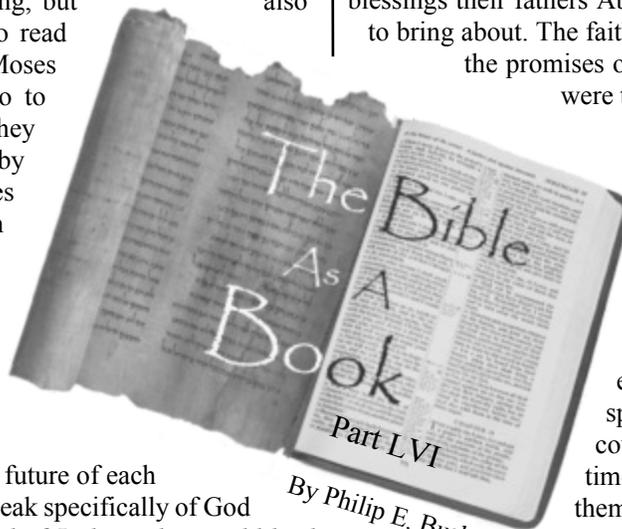
*“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”
Colossians 2:8*

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We ended our last segment still in our overview of the Book of Deuteronomy but very near the end of that book. In covering the last days of Moses' life we see how he spent his time not just passing his leadership role to Joshua but emphasizing how important the work God had given the nation was to their lives. He does this by, once again, making the point they need not blame God when everything in the nation starts to fall apart at anytime, because such a thing would only happen if the nation refused to follow the Laws of God which they had committed to follow. We see Moses giving Laws concerning how often to review the Laws of God. This was to be a continual verbal thing, but also included the nation being told to read the Law every seven years. As Moses had finally done all he could do to bring the nation into what they needed to be, he ends his time by giving blessings and prophecies concerning each tribe and nation as a whole. Covering all this brought us through the end of Deuteronomy chapter 33 verse 25, and we will begin with verse 26 of that chapter this time.



By Philip E. Busby

After speaking about the future of each tribe, Moses would now turn to speak specifically of God in reference to Him being the God of Joshua who would lead the nation into the promised land. Moses points out how God is He who rides upon the wind, which is a reference to the fact God is not some false god with the power of the wind or the wind itself. No, God is the God who created the wind, and thus controls its every motion. In Him lays all the power to do the things Israel needs as they cross over Jordan to take the land of promise. Moses points out that God will thrust out Israel's enemies and tell Israel to destroy them. This is an interesting small piece of information Moses is giving as he describes the enemy as being thrust out before Israel is told to destroy, and that is exactly the case. God had already done the work of defeating these enemies, all Israel had to do was be the physical tool to destroy them. This would be done for all the eyes of men to see. Israel could easily do this because God would be the

refuge they could always count on. In the end, Israel was suppose to dwell in the land alone without other nations to hinder them, and there they would be safe.

Moses also refers to the wells of Jacob, and if we remember our stories of Isaac's and Jacob's lives, we know they had to fight to protect the wells Abraham and the family in general had built. These wells are what kept the flocks watered and cared for the needs of the people living on the land. It was very much the land's lifeblood, and so Moses uses this as a reference to the fact God would give them the very places and blessings their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had worked to bring about. The faithfulness of past generations to live in

the promises of God and the blessings that brought were to be fulfilled and enjoyed in the days

Israel now lived. Moses points out

how blessed Israel was/is to have God as their protector and caregiver. It would cause the nation to easily overcome all who came against them, and even take the lands of their enemies as their own. These are the words Moses ends his life as leader of Israel speaking to the people. What more could he do but encourage them one last time to trust the promises God had given them were true and follow the Laws which were vital to them seeing these blessings.

This was never about punishment for not appeasing God such as men think concerning false gods which they create. This was about Israel having a job to do in the plan of God, which is that none should perish but all come to repentance in a life lived walking before Him. It was about giving Israel the tools and instructions needed to see physical land bloom and wealth created. It was about God wanting them to stand in a place of continual desire for righteousness so they would be in a place God could continually bless them!

With these words Moses would now go into the mountains of Moab where God had instructed him to go as his life would come to an end. As God had promised, He would show Moses all the land Israel was to initially take as they

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crossed over Jordan. In the description we see a list of the highlights of what Moses saw, and in it there are two things. First, we are told Moses sees a greater distance than just the view from even this high mountain of Pisgah would allow. However, even if you believe this is still just a generalization of seeing a vast land laid out in front of Moses, there is the second point that Moses saw some details one would not be able to see by just standing on this mountain. It would seem in this God allowed Moses a view of the land that came with some very telescopic vision. Some might be tempted to say Moses was taken on a flying tour of the land, but we are told nothing about God taking him on anything of the kind. There is also the point that if he had even in a spiritual way flown over the land there would be more details than just the city of Jericho, which would be the first city the nation would take. Thus, what we see here is Moses being allowed to see what no human on their own would be able to see with just your eyes. Moses was given the ability by God to see enough to get a real picture of what the land looked like from end to end and from the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea. This view would be permitted Moses before he left this world, for it is specified again here that God would not allow Moses to go into the land. This is the land God specifically promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for their future generations.

Next we are not only told again that Moses would not be allowed to enter the land of promise, but as the next verses tell us of Moses' death it goes on to specify it would be here in the land of Moab Moses' body would be buried. This is a striking fact as even Joseph, who yes had been born and lived many years in the promised land before being sold into slavery, instructed his bones one day be carried out of Egypt to be taken back to the promised land. (Josh. 24:32) This was to be done when the day came the children of Israel left Egypt to return to the land God had promised their fathers. So we are told that as Moses leads the nation out of Egypt, the bones of Joseph are indeed taken with them and carried over these long years of travel through the wilderness in order to be buried in the land. However, Moses, the man who had led the people all this way, the man to whom God had given the Law which Israel was to follow, the man who had communed with God face to face, that man's body would not even be carried over the Jordan to be buried in the promised land.

Was this because the children of Israel would not have went to the effort to do such a thing? Of course not! It was the fact God had said Moses would not step foot in the promised land that we are told even Moses' body was buried by God here in the land of Moab. However, it is also specific that to this very day no man knows where his grave is! Israel was specifically not to take Moses with them into the land in any way, and while some would look at this as Moses' great punishment, it is not really so much about that. Not only have we talked before of how this was not all about Moses making one unforgivable mistake in striking instead of speaking to the rock as God had instructed, it was really about keeping Moses from becoming a god of some kind to Israel. We see right off that as Israel is coming out of Egypt they did not even last long enough for Moses to receive the Law from God on Mount Sinai before they had built for themselves a false god to worship, and

claimed it was the god who had brought them out of Egypt. (Ex. 32:1-5) However, after being punished with forty years of wandering in the wilderness for their distrust in God as they were suppose to enter the land, they would still be tempted again and again by false religions.

Now, one of the affects of the Tower of Babel is that every culture desires to be a little different while being enough the same as to not be left out in the world. This is our constant contradiction. We want to be unique but we are not willing to live in that uniqueness if it puts us on the outside of whatever is considered the norm. Thus, while Israel would say they wanted to be like other nations in so many ways, they would also look to something very culturally theirs to build a false religion around. The fact each culture desires to have something uniquely theirs is why God created a nation all His own. Israel was to have a very unique culture not because it was designed to be that way so much, but because man had turned so hard from the true ways of God that any culture focused on serving the ways of God in this world was going to be very different from the ways other people choose to live. This is why over and over Moses stresses the point Israel was not to leave off following the Law and also not reinterpret It as the years passed. They were to know It, remember It, and follow It generation after generation. This would give them the correct ways to live, and God could bless them as He desired to bless all people.

This would be Israel's great struggle. They would constantly struggle with their own desires to go in the same ways all men wanted to go for the same reasons other men chose those ways. They would also struggle with the fact following God's Laws would make them very different in the world from others. They would be tempted by the fleshly pleasures other ways of life offered. They would be persecuted at times and looked at as strange for living in the ways God told them to, not because they were/are not the ways we all should live on many levels, but because other men have not chosen to live those ways at all. All these things would be pressures on Israel as they attempted to do what God was asking them to do. The last thing Israel needed was to be tempted to worship a man who was very unique to them. A man who had shown greater wisdom and power than they had seen in all their lives and experiences. Moses had overcome the powerful magicians of Egypt and destroyed the pharaoh who himself was suppose to be a god! Moses had parted the Red Sea so they could escape Egypt's army, and Moses would cause the sea to come in on that army to finish them off once and for all. Moses had talked with God so closely at one point his face glowed with the power of God until it made the people request he cover it because they feared it. Moses had caused bread to appear for the nation as if it was the morning dew, and brought quail to eat as if they were locust. Moses had brought water from a rock twice, and more things than we have space to list here. All these things were done by the hand of Moses, and, of course, we should all understand that these things were not done by Moses but by God. However, we have trouble with that so often as humans. We have a great tendency to look at only the physical.

People often feel they are alright because they do, in

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

We ended our last segment with Hagar and Ismael in the wilderness of Beersheba where they had wandered around until all the water they had with them was gone. We discussed a lot about how the two of them had very different ideas on what they thought should happen from this point and time. Also, how those thoughts had brought them to this situation in which they now stood, far enough away from each other so as not to hear each other and both praying to God. In the end, it was not Hagar's prayer, which we are told the details of, that was answered. It was Ismael's prayer, of which we are told no details, that was answered. However, from what God tells us he said to Hagar we get a pretty clear picture of what Ismael prayed for, and it's important we keep those thoughts in our mind as we begin this time. All this brought us to Genesis chapter 21 verse 17, but we did not finish verse 17 so we will continue with it in this segment.

While it's true God makes it clear in this verse more than once that He heard the prayer of Ismael in this situation, the voice of an angel calls out to Hagar, not Ismael. As we talked about last time, this has to do with her truly being the one whom Ismael needed. He needed the care of his mother, and so God does not go to Ismael and tell him something such as, "I will take care of your mother, but as for you...." No, God goes to Hagar and asks her what is troubling her? I love this part of the story because it reflects where most of us are on so many occasions when we think everything is so bad off. I don't mean to bring pain to anyone who is truly suffering because it does come to that at times, but even then, if we hold on to God, the point here is ultimately true. The problem is it is so hard for us to see it even in not so bad situations! Sure, Hagar and Ismael were out in this wilderness with no water left and no immediate or nearby source to get more. Sure, as humans this would cause any of us to cry out to God, but as we talked about Hagar had put herself into this situation. She had left Abraham's house with the hope her son would go on without her and live his life. Now, here they were, both their lives at risk, and she was desperate, or was she?

In the human mind, we think we are desperate so often when we are not, as long as we have God on our side. Thus, God does not even respond to what Hagar said in any detailed way. God basically ignores her thoughts and asks Hagar to examine what is really troubling her. You see, what was troubling Hagar was not that they had no water. What had been troubling her for so long now was the fact she did not want to go on after having to leave Abraham's house. This was at the core of what Hagar did not like, and all the actions she had taken which led to this moment were because of this. In this we see she had led her son into a death trap as well, which was the total opposite of what she desired to do. We can obviously blame that on Ismael for staying with her, but in spite of the fact his choices are involved here, he never would have made them if it had not been for what his mother did. This shows us how

much our actions, no matter the intent behind them, can and do effect those around us. Hagar had ended up in this situation almost by intent, but had not anticipated the loyalty of her son.

So was the situation desperate? By human standards yes, but nothing was going to be solved by God simply pulling them out of this situation. If Hagar could lead them into this due to core feelings she had inside, pulling them out of this situation was only going to lead them into another one just as bad. Probably the best example we have of this is the children of Israel as they go through the wilderness. Over and over they complained to Moses that he had led them out into this wilderness to die or that God brought them out there to kill them. Of course, none of this was true, and in those situations they were not even as bad off as Hagar and Ismael were here. What the children of Israel saw were supplies of water and food getting low, and with the great numbers of them and little to no sources of water and food around, it seemed as if their next meal was their last. This frightened them over and over again. However, an interesting fact is given to us in Deuteronomy 29:5 where we are told at the end of all those years they spent wandering the wilderness and getting to a more stable place to live, their shoes and clothing had somehow made it through without wearing out. We never hear them murmuring about how they would not have shoes to wear or that their clothing supplies were almost gone and so Moses and/or God needed to do something about it!

Many would argue this is simply because as long as they had decent clothes and shoes I'm sure they did not worry about it, whereas food and water are more immediate concerns. This is true but it is the point in many ways. They simply never thought about it! They gave little to no thought about how strange it was they went year after year with this being the case. Why? Because when it came to shoes and clothing God simply took care of it. Because no clothing, and certainly no shoes, would last so long under these circumstances, we know this was a miracle. It is a big miracle when one looks at the fact they walked mile after mile many days. Shoes and supplies of clothing should have been a major concern over such a time of living as they lived, yet it was a non-factor in their journey; something they did not even notice or really think about until God pointed it out. In saying that, I will point out that for all the years of growing up hearing about the miracles God did for the children of Israel this is not one we remember or think much about. You don't hear an entire lesson taught or a sermon preached on the basis something simply never needed replaced.

Why? Because the provisions God gives us to simply get through each day and circumstance are not the spectacular miracles we remember or even are aware of, and how can they be? For all the space I have used in this writing to talk about Israel's shoes and clothes, what more can be said? It simply happened, but what if it had not? These are the things we need

to think about. God so often brings us through things, and while there may even be spectacular miracles of healing and provisions that we remember, there are more little things we would never have thought to ask for but God simply did for us anyway. We not only did not give such things a second thought, we might not have given them a first! This is what Jesus was telling us about the grass of the fields and the birds of the air. (Matt. 6:25-34) He said they do not toil, and while we may think that about grass, birds seem to put in the work. In spite of this, they simply do not worry or fret about their life. This does not mean they don't have instincts that guide them to be afraid at times and take certain actions. It does not mean they will not go out in search of food when supplies are running low or that grass does not take damage when the rain does not fall. All that aside, they still do not worry. They just take it as it comes.

What Jesus was pointing out is that in God they live and in God they pass away. Such is the physical existence God created here. Natives of the Americas as well as Africa and other places around the world clearly have and have had in their culture the idea that everything is connected. They believed the fact the tree grew and the water flowed was connected to the fact the ground and rocks were not as dead as one tends to think. They believed these things because they saw how it is true a tree clearly had life, but that life is sustained by the water and soil it takes in. The soil is replenished with the leaves that fall from the tree, and when the tree itself dies one day even its very trunk will return to the earth. They understood man seemed to be no different in this cycle, and so they believed humans were connected to all this as well. Of a truth, we are! However, it is only our physical forms that are connected, and that only in the death part by the fact we fell into sin and lost our access to the Tree of Life. However, this did not change our spirit, which is eternal, and ancient cultures could not deny that, at least not to the degree so many people in "modern" societies attempt to today. This led them to believe things such as everything living and many things we would say are not living actually had a spirit as well. Much of these same philosophies give us the thought that our spirit is only a piece of a larger whole of what is the spiritual realm. There's the idea that when we are born a piece of that spirit comes to have a unique experience as an individual, and when we die it simply returns to the whole. There are other thoughts such as the idea our spirit lives as a human for a time and then goes on to be something else. Maybe we have been an animal at some point, now we are a human, and after death maybe we will be a tree. Others think more streamlined in that we simply keep coming back as another person.

All these thoughts are based in the understanding all humans have, regardless of what people say with their mouth, which is that we are all more than the physical shell we see on the outside. Problem is, they are an attempt to explain the reason for why and/or how it all works without learning the truth from God. As with the fact Eve should never have taken of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil after talking to the serpent without first discussing it exhaustively with God, this is what very ancient people should have done. After God formed the chosen nation and gave within them His oracles the answers became even easier to find! (Rom. 3:1-2) However,

even this was only going to help those who chose to seek the truth, and to this day that is what we all need to do. In the end, the truth is that we live and we die. There is nothing we can do about it. We can choose to live in very unhealthy ways and we will most likely shorten our life here. We can try to live as healthy as possible and maybe extend our lives here, but even these things come with no guarantee. Thus, we die. It will happen at some point, and when it does our body will lose all hope. It might become a part of the ecosystem but that is not hope or new life, just the physical doing what it was created to do. For from dust we were formed and unto dust we will return. (Gen. 3:19) The difference between us and the animals, trees, etc. is that into us God breathed the breath of life. This part of us was not formed from the dust and it will not return to the dust. So where does it go? The answer to that is in what God said about dust to dust and ashes to ashes. If our bodies were made from the dust and return to the dust then all we need to look at is, where did our breath or soul come from? The answer is simple, "And the Lord God...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Genesis 2:7 Our soul came directly from God and that is where we will return. When we say Jesus is the Word, it is a truth deeper than we understand. When we talk about how in Him we live and breathe and have our being, it is truly our very existence we are talking about. (Acts 17:24-28)

As much as it is true, God created it all, including the physical form we live in, that which is not of the body came from that piece of a greater whole like some ancient cultures believe. The real difference is that the piece of Himself that God used to make man a living soul was not given in order to live for a time and simply be reabsorbed by God. No, it was truly the gift of life into humanity, and every child who is born shares in that gift! Every child that is born becomes an individual, and that is a permanent thing. Our soul will go on forever as the individual thing it now is, and what that means is that what should concern us is not what happens to us here, for we know this life will end one way or the other, but what happens to our soul when it leaves this earthly life. It should concern us that our existence will be incomplete due to losing our physical part. When we see life in the correct way, the day by day events of our lives take on a whole other light. The problem is we far too little look at our lives from that perspective. Instead, we look at our lives from the perspective of what is going on around us at any given moment. We go with the emotions at the time, and that is what Hagar was doing. No doubt Hagar had been greatly discouraged for the future of her son when it became obvious that Abraham was looking for God to still provide a son through Sarah. While Sarah certainly showed she had her doubts right up to as close as a year before Isaac's birth, and Abraham had at least some trouble wrapping his head around it, this does not mean the knowledge God had said it would happen had not been made clear to the household. No doubt someone such as Hagar, being the mother of Ismael who would be displaced when it did happen, was fully aware.

This likely means she lived for some time at this point with the knowledge her son would not have the life she originally thought he'd have. The idea he would simply be just another son of Abraham had time to sink in, and the fall to where they now stood was not as far as it might have been if

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XXX

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

"Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people."

We ended last time talking about how much the persecution of those who believed in Jesus was not helpful in the long term for the Jews. While they felt they were doing what they could to stomp out what they saw as a false religion that was corrupting the beliefs of Judaism, those from the outside were watching with interest. That point about how the Jews who did not accept Jesus looked at those who did is an important one to look at. The religious leadership had already gone to the great length of killing Jesus in an attempt to stop this movement from going forward, but that did not work. Thus, in the same spirit the religious leaders went and asked Pilate for guards at Jesus' tomb (because they did not want the disciples stealing the body and claiming Jesus had rose), they now went out to try and cut off those who continued the work of Jesus and the message about how He rose from the dead.

As we have covered so many times, this is the ultimate example of how much good intentions can be the very worst thing. The religious leadership believed it best to do all these things on the basis they wanted their power to remain intact. However, they were able to justify it all by seeing themselves as the guardians of their faith and beliefs. This is not a uniquely Jewish trait by any means, but as with so many things the Jews show us, a human trait and one of the main reasons God established a nation among us specifically instructed to follow a set of laws He gave them. This is part of the issue that makes it so wrong to argue even Jews should leave the Law behind now that Jesus has come. It is still true the nation can show us ourselves, and this trying to defend a belief system instead of seeking the truth above all is what happens in all religions. Thus, it's never about if the Jews should drop the Law or change to something more like Christian practices, but if they are following the true Law or just as a man-made religious system, is the question. Following practices of men, no matter what their base, is what led the Jews to kill the very Messiah the Law showed them they should have been waiting for. It also caused them to go on to persecute those who did accept The Messiah! Not only was this later used as an excuse by those calling themselves Christians to persecute Jews, but before anything claiming to be of Jesus was a powerful enough political entity to do any damage to the Jews, this early action by the religious leadership left a real black mark on the nation as a whole.

As we talked a bit about last time, the Romans had been very accepting of the Jewish religion. So much so it had become one of the officially recognized religions in the Roman Empire. This means wherever Jews lived across the empire, they were allowed to follow their beliefs and customs without official government interference. If that interference did come, they

could appeal to the high rulers of Rome for relief. This is a unique situation for the Jews as almost always their religion was rejected and persecuted by ruling powers. However, this did not mean the Jewish way of doing things was seen as normal by any means. There are stories about how Jews ended up in servitude and were sold off or even set free solely on the basis their masters found their customs so odd they just wanted them out of their household. This is how the ways of God are looked at in the world, and why most who call themselves Christians today want to bend what they believe in order to fit in or so their religion will fit in with their everyday lives. We don't want to be seen as odd, strange, or different to such a degree that others would reject us simply on the basis of the way our faith makes us live.

For Christians the true test of this is when we so desire to follow the ways of God that it separates us from what calls itself the church. If we don't want to look at the group of believers we are with as so official, then I'll add, the same thing happens no matter how big or official any group feels it is at any moment. That "feels" part can even change rapidly by who else is in our lives. Other people we work with or need/want to be around on any regular basis can affect us. If they are part of a larger more "successful" group, then often we want to be too. If they seem to look down on the fact our group is so small that can discourage us as well. In the end, it can also come down to sheer numbers. If our group becomes too small or - dare I say - it's just you and maybe a family member or two, will we hold to the truth or look for a group to fit in with? You see, as believers when we say we are in this world but not of it, that is a truth beyond what most who say it even understand. You can make the excuse the Jews are very strange because of the way they follow the letter of the Law more than the spirit, but this is a dangerous mindset. First, it is never good to attempt to so generally judge others in this way, but we should really shy away from doing so when it comes to those who follow a Law given by God. Why? Because no matter how much the Jews show the truth of how we tend to take religion over truth, the set of Laws they are attempting to follow were commanded by God, and if nothing else, given by God. No matter how good or bad all they do may seem, that point is at its core!

And that point is what should have driven them to be far more cautious in persecuting the early believers. Not only should everything the believers in Jesus were doing have made them stop over and over again to rethink their position on Jesus and Who He was, if nothing else, they should have seen how little others likely saw the line between the Jews and the Christians. The view that is so hard for us to keep in mind today is that in those early days to be Christian was to primarily be Jewish but believe The Messiah had come. In no way was it looked at as a Jews versus Christians thing! We get that impression today because of our current political and religious condition which exists due to centuries of history between those

who accepted Jesus as The Messiah and those who did not. We also read the stories of how the apostles went out to win the world for Christ, and we often miss how they went first to the synagogues and the Jews at large. We get focused on the fact they ended up finding great acceptance among the non-Jews. What we forget is that the apostles would never have gone out into such far reaching areas so fast if there had not been great acceptance first among the Jews.

This point is also what made the Jewish religious leadership so upset. They were always afraid Jesus was going to cut in on or take away completely their authority and positions among the people. However, after doing what they thought would get rid of Him, they went on to find there was an even greater number of Jews already won over to Jesus than they probably imagined. To them it must have seemed like a growing cancer that was spreading fast and would change the entire Jewish nation. Truth is they were right! It was on track to do just that, as it was meant to be. The Gospel was changing the fabric of the nation by turning them back from the religious ways and to the truth of looking for and now following The Messiah. It was true in the physical sense that Jesus was God with us, but that point is key to the understanding of what was going on. Man needed God to be more physical because that is where his eyes had turned to completely. Whether Jesus was with us long term or short term, the point stands that God being with us was a way for all men to be assured God truly was still in the picture. No governments or empires man could build was going to change the plan of God. He created us to commune with Him, and He will draw all those who want what they were created for unto Himself.

That is what Jesus came to do. He was to be lifted up so all men would have the chance to see him. In doing so, all who cared to know and have the true ways of God would be drawn to what He did and said. (John 12:29-36) This would be true of Jesus' work no matter if people were or were not part of the chosen nation. This would be true no matter if the person knew anything about what a Jew was or not. Jesus was the simple message that God was and is with us. He is available to us and wants to be with us. Jesus is the simple message of how much God will not push Himself on us or force us to choose what He created us to do. God did not even force the chosen nation to accept Jesus. What more could God do to show us how much He will not force us? However, what happened also shows us how much God will not just save us in the end if we do not choose a relationship with Him for ourselves. (John 1:11-13) This is why we see so many Jews both accepting and rejecting The Messiah. There were those who said, yes this is The Christ sent to save us from our wicked ways. Then there were those who said, no our religion is more important than the truth it represents. For the latter we see a great contradiction, but not one uncommon among men. We also see a main point in our discussion about the persecution of the Christians.

The very fact Jesus was the true fulfillment of the prophecies and all the Law the Jews followed on a daily basis was not lost on the world any more than it was on the Jewish religious leadership. I have said it many times, they did not kill Jesus because they did not believe He was The Messiah but because He was not The Messiah they wanted! Thus, the church

that was growing out of His work was not what they wanted to see the Jewish nation and/or religion turn into. This transition is what those on the outside were able to see. If you doubt that, all you need to do is look at the Book of Acts and see how the apostles went into places and headed straight for the synagogue. Whether the Jews in such places took their message to heart or not, there was so often non-Jews waiting to hear the message themselves. This is why Peter had to be shown it was good to take the message to the non-Jews in spite of them having little to no knowledge of the Law and prophets. There was enough knowledge out there of who the Jews were and what they stood for that this news of Jesus was very interesting to them. Surrounding people were eager to hear what had happened among the Jews. That interest was heightened by the fact they could tell what Jesus had done was of great interest to the common Jew but hated by the bureaucratic religious leaders. They saw how much Jesus had brought life to something that the religious leaders had always presented in such a dead way!

As God puts it in Revelation over and over, those who had ears to hear the message of The Messiah were truly taking note. (Rev. 2:29) A great example of how others in the world knew it was special that the Jewish Messiah had come is that wise men (of which the Bible never tells us there were only three) came following a star to find Jesus. These men gave gifts worthy of being given to a king, and they had traveled far to do so. How shocked they must have been to see the ruler of the region did not know where or who The Messiah was. How amazing it must have been to them to find Mary and Joseph with the baby in a common house with no fanfare surrounding them. These men came to see The King of Kings and Lord of Lords among the nation to whom God had said He would be sent, and yet they laid their gifts down before a simple family living in an everyday home. Never the less, they rejoiced at seeing what they came to really see, and they listened to the voice of God telling them not to return to Herod. In the end, it did not matter to them who did or did not react the way they did, only that The God whom they served had fulfilled a promise they understood we all needed!

It's interesting because we often distinguish non-Jews from Jews by calling them Gentiles, but the word really does not denote simply a non-Jewish person. Gentile is really talking about the people of the nations which surrounded the chosen nation; people who had constant exposure to the Jews. This had been even more far reaching due to the nation being taken off their land and sent into many areas of the world. So, many people who would not have been so directly exposed to the nation by sharing a boarder with them were exposed by having Jews live in their communities. This truth is still with us today. In spite of the millions of Jews who have returned to the land of Israel to be back on their land, there are Jewish communities all over the world. The different customs God's Law causes them to follow still sets them apart and makes many of these communities and/or families distinct. This was true in the days after Jesus to be sure. Jews were living in all the places the apostles took the Gospel. They even had synagogues to which the apostles could go in order to present the Gospel. What this kind of exposure meant for the non-Jews was that they saw the difference the message of Jesus made to what the Jews lived, and it intrigued them.

This was always meant to happen, and it's important we remember that. Just as with the wise men, it did not matter how many or how few of the Jews accepted the Gospel, the apostles would have always turned to the non-Jews to teach those among them who would listen. We tend to think the Gospel went only to the non-Jews because so many Jews rejected it, but that is not what the words in the Bible mean. When we see things about how God turned to the Gentiles, and such, it is not telling us He would not have if the Jews had come in mass. It is telling us how direct this had to become. It was in God's perfect plan that the Jews be the ministers of the world! I am not saying there would have never been those outside the nation who became ministers, but the leadership role was the nation's to take. As I have hammered on before, the heart of not just the Jewish nation but all believers is in Jerusalem, and the Jews were always intended to administer that city. Because the Jews did not want to administer the Law in direct representation of what Jesus had fulfilled, the ministry was left with a void and it seems Christians have no part in Jerusalem. However, this left no void because no matter what happens we can all turn our eyes to Jerusalem. (I Kin. 8:27-30) The void in the ministry did need to be filled, and it would be filled by non-Jewish men being called into the ministry.

The fact there had to be a dependence on the non-Jews to be so heavily used in teaching the multitudes that came to Jesus is why we see what we think of as a more distinct line between the Jews and Christians. Instead of a church where Jews primarily teach the Gospel, using their unique insight of being raised in the Law as they did so, we see a vast amount of churches which contain no Jews at all. As the church grew by leaps and bounds, instead of having a ready-made pool of Jews going out to minister in the churches, we see Paul carrying a heavy burden of traveling from church to church attempting to bring along many who had more questions than he had time to answer. This is where we get the bulk of what we call the New Testament. Paul writes so many "books," as we see it today, because he could not keep up with it all. He could not make it back or around to a certain place where people were writing to ask questions, or he heard news of them looking at something incorrectly. Thus, he would write a letter to that church, often starting with things such as, it was my great hope to come to you and/or if The Lord wills I will come to you at a later time, but until then follow what I have said here.

These letters would then get passed around among the churches and they began to keep copies of them for themselves. Why? Because especially among a church without Jewish ministers versed in the Law to teach them, they all had a lot of the same questions! Paul's letters gave the answers they needed and/or enough guidance for them to start down the path of understanding a lot of issues in their walk with The Lord. This became so necessary and heavily depended on that Paul's letters ended up being revered as Scripture. Don't get me wrong, they are ordained by God, but what we lose track of is how meaningless they are without the Law. All Paul wrote, along with the other letters preserved from Peter, James, etc. were an attempt to explain what Jews might have intuitively known but which non-Jews needed a lot of help in order to even begin to see. Paul even deals with the issue of how there was no difference between the Jew and the Greek in God's eyes, but the

Jews had a great advantage in every way, because unto them was committed the Oracles of God! (Rom. 3:1-2) This should cause us to see how useless the letters of Paul and all the New Testament is without the Law. Set on their own they are nothing more than a jumble of what seems to some no more than a few tidbits of morality here and there, and in a way that is not far from true.

This came about because we are not wise men. We see that church does not seem to contain any Jewishness. We see how the Jewish religion is opposed to Christianity. We then see the two as totally separate from one another and shy away from the Hebrew Bible, even calling it the Old Testament instead! The damage of all this runs so deep that when a church does attempt to turn and teach the Law, we easily get confused and begin to debate how much non-Jews must follow the Law like a Jew. If there is even a sign a church teaches the Law by observing and/or just teaching the feasts and/or having other things that obviously appear Jewish, people immediately ask, are you Jewish? They see it as something strange which they do not belong to, can not be, or do not want to be a part of. That is the saddest part. What masquerades as Christian today is so far removed from not just its roots but its beating heart and thus, its very life and truth, the seeking of the truth is not exciting to them as it was to the Gentiles of the apostles' day. Instead, it is often seen as something to shy away or even run from!

This has both a Jew and non-Jew cause behind it. Yes, the Jews as a nation did not receive the truth, and that set the stage for there to be a separation between the Jews who accepted and those who did not accept Jesus as The Messiah. However, it was the non-Jews who took advantage of this separation and brought persecution to both the Jews and the Christians. The problem is we feel empowered when we see things going well. For the Jewish leadership at the time of the apostles all things were good with the Jews and Rome. While one of the main reasons the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus had to do with them wanting a Messiah who would set them free from Rome, the very thing that empowered them to take Jesus had to do with their comfort in dealing with the Romans. This would never have been the case with the Greeks, or even the Medes & Persians before them who had been good at times to the nation. Never would the Jews have wanted to ask of any ruling power what they asked of Rome in killing Jesus.

That is so often the very problem we have in thinking we can judge the ways of God. We not only look at the outward appearance of individuals, but of situations. (II Cor. 10:7-11) We tend to live for the moment without care for what the very possible near future holds. This, even in spite of the fact our very actions will play a part in what that future is. It was not so bad for the Jews to exercise their freedom in persecuting the believers in Jesus, but once cracks in the relationship with Rome began to form, they found, as had often been the case, no love lost for their religion in the empire. I know there is the argument this would have always been the case, but one of the reasons they were trying to stomp out the Christians had to do with the fact they feared Christianity would be seen as a distortion of the Jewish religion. Once cracks started with Rome this did not matter. If Rome saw it that way and persecuted the Jews, they would persecute the Christians. If they did not see it that way,

even the Jews ability to stomp out the Christians completely would not have stopped Rome from persecuting the Jews. The problem is that what people of God have needed for a long time in this world is the ability to follow the ways of God in spite of how few agree.

Thus, it certainly was not helpful for Rome to see the Jews themselves persecuting any other religion of the empire. If Rome was showing a hate for the religion maybe this could come off as helpful to Rome, but with that not being the case, it only heightened the argument that Jews took liberty to persecute others. If Rome was a tolerant government entity this in and of itself brought a division between the nation and Rome that never should have even been hinted at. All this aside, it simply does not matter if we think it will make a difference or not, the point is, it hurts our witness to others. We show ourselves no higher than any other religion, belief, or people, when we do such a thing, and this stands true even of the later groups who call(ed) themselves the church who were/are responsible for persecuting God's chosen nation. None of this kind of activity should be carried out by the people of God. This is not to say we accept other religions and their thoughts with open arms. It simply means we should do what we know is right in order to be the best witness we can be no matter what it may cause others to do to us. This we do while letting other people know what Jesus showed us so clearly - it is up to each individual to make up their own mind! (Rom. 12:1-2)

In any case, that is not what the religious leaders did, and when the rift came between the Jews and Rome it was only a matter of time until things went wrong. To see how that happened we go back to the history of the Roman leaders. If I am not mistaken the last Roman ruler we talked about was the man best known to Bible students as Caesar Augustus. This was the man who was ruling at the time Jesus was born, and the man I mentioned in our last segment as having carried on the Roman policy of recognizing the Jewish religion as one of the officially accepted ones in the empire. This man was emperor until his death in 14 A.D. After him a man named Tiberius Claudius Nero came to power. He was the son of Augustus' third wife by another marriage, and he married one of Augustus' daughters. Augustus would adopt Tiberius and that would make him part of the family more officially as a son, and his name would become Tiberius Julius Caesar. This would pave the way for him to succeed Augustus, and that he would do. Tiberius would rule from 14 to 37 A.D., and that would make him the ruler during Jesus' ministry and death, along with the beginnings of the church.

As we look at the history, Tiberius was not a man who comes into play during all this. It was Pilate that we are more familiar with who was the Roman governor of the region. It is likely the story of what happened between Pilate and Jesus was something Tiberius knew nothing about until it was all said and done, if at all. On many levels he likely did not care. The case of Jesus to him would have seemed a trivial matter in the midst of the many affairs of the empire. However, it had to be a more notable thing to him when the Jewish leadership began persecuting the believers in Jesus. This would become more predominant with the fact believers in Jesus would not remain

contained to just Jews. Jewish religious leaders dealing with some internal Jewish religious matter would have been one thing, but once the church began including greater numbers of non-Jews, the issue became more sensitive to Rome. One should keep in mind that one of the great reasons Pilate even listened to the religious leaders the day they brought Jesus, had to do with keeping the peace. Pilate did not want an uprising among the Jews, but this had to do with the way such a thing would effect the general stability of the region and empire.

Tiberius no doubt had his eye on all the Jews were doing at this point, and about the last thing Rome wanted to see was Jews reaching outside their direct territory and effecting non-Jews who would surely complain to Rome about it. To some degree Rome was use to these religious leaders reaching out across the empire to deal with Jews, but this was mostly to set ordinances for how to follow the Law. The fact this could be handy probably had some to do with motivating Rome to accept Judaism as an official religion. What should be kept in mind is that this kind of thinking has to do more with not caring about Jews than it did caring about them. Other citizens of the empire might have been very angry that Rome would not help them against some power, especially a religious one, that reached out to wherever they might be in the empire. However, Jews living as Jews was something no empire understood well. Thus, keeping these strange people in check is more of the best case scenario. However, keeping Jews from arguing among themselves or with others through the religious leaders giving ordinances about Jewish things is not what persecuting the believers in Jesus was. That was clearly the religious leaders little by little over stepping their bounds.

In spite of this, the peace between the Jews and Rome was not really disrupted during the reign of Tiberius. However, this man would die and a man named Caligula came to power in 37 A.D. This man was Tiberius' grand-nephew, so in that way the dynasty continued. To give the timeline a bit more, Jesus died in approximately 29 A.D., and by the time of Caligula in 37 A.D., we are through the events of approximately the ninth chapter of the Book of Acts. This is the conversion of Saul to Paul. From this, it is a bit easier to see how the persecution was building during Tiberius' reign, as we know, Saul was one of the main people in those early days with the zeal to go out and directly act against the believers in Jesus. Up until such times, the believers had mostly been persecuted by just the local leaders they came in contact with, and those incidents did not always have to do with more than an attempt to discredit what they had to say about Jesus. Thus, as God calls Saul, changing his name to Paul, and he along with others go out to preach the Gospel, we see the transition from Tiberius to Caligula. Caligula would be a man who would spend a great fortune in a short amount of time near the first of his reign. He then went out looking for any excuse to commandeer finances, and that would lead to the first open break between the chosen nation and Rome!

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

**Questions submitted to the Institute, answered by
Philip E. Busby.**

FBS continued from pg. 4

these events had happened all at once. That being said, we tend to look at the half-full glass as one that is half empty, and no doubt that is a bit of what really got to Hagar. She had probably lived with great disappointment at the step down for her son from being the heir to the house to now just a son, if even he would be looked at in that way. Now, they were being sent forth from the house altogether. Hagar had no idea where they should go or would go. She had no idea what would become of her son, and she did not care so much about her own life. All this weighed on her to the point she did not even want to see what the end result was, and it was with this attitude she went wandering in the wilderness. However, just like the children of Israel, what she was not putting enough emphasis on was one factor and one factor alone. Ismael was still a biological son of Abraham and nothing was going to change that fact!

To pretty much everyone in the world at that point and time this would have meant little to nothing. Being the son of Abraham would be seen as a privileged position in the eyes of those who knew who Abraham was because he was a man of great wealth! However, being sent out of the house, Hagar knew they were headed out into a larger world which may not know who Abraham was, and to them the fact her son was Abraham's son would mean nothing. Even to those who might know something about Abraham, this might raise questions or even be seen as an opportunity at revenge on a man they could not touch otherwise. People might have wondered why Ismael was sent away from the house, and obviously this would seem to mean he would get none of the wealth. For those who might have respected Abraham they may have thought it best not to have anything to do with a son who for unknown reasons was sent out of his house. Thus, there was no reason for much of anyone to treat Ismael any better than they would any common stranger, or even worse, on the basis Ismael was a son of Abraham.

However, all this, again, is the glass half empty way of looking at it all. In many ways, it is worse than half because the other side of this is the fact God had said Abraham would be the father of many nations. One of the best ways for this to happen is obvious, and that is by his sons becoming nations or at least the beginnings of them. To do this their lives need to go a certain direction. That direction is not necessarily one of great comfort and/or wealth, but it certainly means they were going to build a life where they too had children who could go on to be the nation(s) God spoke of. Let us not forget the entire reason Ismael was born had to do with the fact Abraham and Sarah believed they needed to do something in order to have a child for just such a purpose. In any case, being a son of Abraham certainly meant their life was not coming to an end, and anything that did happen which seemed bad to us as humans is nothing more than mistakes of men (such as the place Hagar and Ismael were in at this point), or something that needed to happen in order to make them something in the long term (such as what happened with Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt). The point is, Ismael was not going to just die here in this wilderness. The bottom line is that with God all things are possible and God was with them. It simply did not matter what fleshly thoughts Hagar may have had about the

situation not going well, God had already determined to use Ismael, so nothing was going to be as bad as she thought.

This is why the first thing we see God saying to Hagar is the question of what ailed her? In the flesh she had a lot of problems, but if she would put her hope in God, there was nothing to fear. She did not need to be out here in this wilderness with no water. She did not need to die or give up in any way. God tells her He had heard the cry of Ismael and he had prayed for something different than Hagar. God's answer to Hagar's prayer was that she needed to simply trust God knew what He was doing. Then God gives Hagar another instruction we often think of as having to do with the idea Ismael was just a child. When we do this we enter verse 18 with a different interpretation of the words in that we think God is saying pick up your baby. Instead, the instruction to "...lift up the lad,...", is about going to Ismael and encouraging him. This would be a complete reverse from what she had been doing up to this point on the journey as she had discouraged him greatly! God goes on to tell her to hold him in her hand. This again is not about holding a child but about her needing to continue to guide him in his life. She was not to leave him with the selfish thought she did not want to see what happened to him. She was to take what happened to him into her hands and guide the unfolding of his life, looking to God continually for the answers as to how to do that.

This is directly connected to the next fact that God would make of Ismael a great nation. The idea he would be one of the nations God said would come from Abraham is a fact I don't believe Ismael was old enough to really grasp, nor might he have cared if his mother had simply left him to fend for himself. However, Hagar knew the promise of God to Abraham. She knew how Abraham and Sarah had used her to have Ismael because they intended him to be the child of Abraham who would fulfill this promise specifically. The loss of this very thing is what Hagar was lamenting because she did not believe that would happen now. Yes, it was true Ismael would not be the chosen nation, but God said he would still be an important one, or more than one as we know today. Hagar was the one who could carry that dream for her son and help him live his life with that understanding. As Ismael grew and figured out how to truly be the man he needed to be, Hagar would be there helping him. As he went through discouragement, Hagar would be there to encourage him with the truth she knew and which God was telling her was still true. As opportunities to gain the right relationships came along Hagar would be better suited to see them and turn her son's life in the right direction. All this was so important she do, and Ismael was certainly in no place to lose his mother. Thus, the door for her to take this role was right in front of her, and this story is a great example of how much God can even take our mistakes and turn them into something useful if we will finally stop and listen. (Rom. 8:28)

Hagar would look up to see another thing right in front of her at this point, and that was a physical item. That physical item would save their lives, for there was a well of water in this place. We are told God opened her eyes to see this well, and when we read this we can take it one of two ways. The first is the idea that God simply caused her to see something that was

there all along and which she had not bothered to look for. The second is that God performed a miracle in order for this well to appear. It is my belief the second one is correct. Not just because it is more spectacular and we like that in our stories, but because I believe God wanted to show Hagar how little she needed to worry. When she thought it was all hopeless and they were going to die, she found, just like the children of Israel would later experience, God can provide something from nothing. God can literally save us from our own mistakes and shortcomings. This well of water was the symbol that no matter what life might bring to her and her son, God could make a way for it to come out as He planned. Man and life's circumstances cannot stop God. All Hagar had to be willing to do was put forth the effort to get up and take hold of what God could provide. She needed only to stop this pouting and whining, get up and walk to that well, get the water, and take it to her son. Then they could get on with their journey in a legitimate direction!

Now, the next two verses do not go into details about where they went or what happened to them next. They do not even tell us any kind of condensed version of Ismael's life and the circumstances which led to him becoming a nation. What we are told is that God was with Ismael and because of this he did not die. Instead, he grew in strength and in knowledge of how to make a way for himself in this world. We are told they did not end up in Egypt. In truth, they did not end up anywhere very specific at all. Ismael and Hagar simply stayed in the wilderness, and there Ismael became an archer. Yes, becoming an archer is a specific thing, but what it is really telling us here is the fact Ismael did not become a farmer, herdsman, or anything in the same line as his father. He also did not become the merchant his later descendants would grow into being. However, trading for supplies was likely something he and his mother got very good at out there in the desolate wasteland. Maybe the best way to look at it is that Ismael became a survivor. He lived in a harsh environment where others feared to stay, and there he was able to make a life. He not only had the ability to hunt the food they needed, he could protect what was theirs. This is all important because it shows us Ismael did not go out to depend on the generosity of others. Like his father Abraham, what Ismael had was due to his own willingness to put in the effort and accept God's provisions in his life. No one made Ismael a king or gave him great wealth. What he and his mother had was all something to give God the glory for!

In verse 21 we see one specific fact that shows us they did end up much further south than where they had run out of water. We are told they end up in the wilderness of Paran. This is an area that lays along the east shores of the Red Sea from the top of the east fork of that sea (which creates the Sinai Peninsula) all the way down to about where the north boarder of Yemen is today. The fact Ismael took up residence in this area is why his later descendants were still part of the region and Israel's history. What we also see in this, is the fact the Arabian population that came from Ismael does not in any way hold claim on the land God promised to give Israel. Israel's land is much further north, and God never even sent Israel as

far south as the area Ismael's people lived. What today we call the Arabian Peninsula is what God allowed Ismael to settle in, and thus it belonged to his descendants. Due to this, there really was no conflict to speak of between Ismael and Israel in ancient times.

The other fact we are given in this verse is that Hagar got a wife for Ismael from Egypt. This makes perfect sense because Egypt would be the place with people she was most familiar with. However, this brings up an important point, and that is the genetic thing again. Egyptian blood is what Hagar had in her already. Abraham, of course, was from Mesopotamia. Abraham works to keep Isaac from taking a wife from Canaan, and, of course, Jacob would go back home to get his two wives. As we have talked about before, this gave the chosen nation a base genetic marker distinct from the people of this region, including Egypt. However, there is the truth that later Jacob clearly had an Egyptian wife, and as much as the Egyptians were suppose to be separate from Israel due to them being herdsmen, I doubt this was a rare example of such a marriage. However, this worked to ensure the chosen nation was also distinct from the people of Mesopotamia. Both Ismael's line and Israel would have considerable Egyptian blood in them, but the bloodline of Ismael would not have as strong a base genetic to hold onto as Israel. This would make both Israel and the descendants of Ismael very traceable as to their being related, but they would also be very different from one another making them distinct people from one another.

These are the facts which are important to us concerning Ismael. There really is no reason for the Bible to follow his life any further in the specifics except for those times when it crossed over with Abraham and/or the descendants who did become the chosen nation. This all goes along with what we have been talking about in that we need to trust God. We can believe God kept His promise or not after reading this. The choice is simply ours to make. However, Ismael did not go on in Biblical times to play much of a factor in the lives of the chosen nation, so we do not hear alot about him or his people. That aside, they would no doubt intermarry with the nation at times as God always intended to place Israel in the midst of a place where they would be surrounded by related people. This would strengthen the genetic markers as Ismael's descendants had the blood of Abraham in them, and Lot's had the same genetics as Abraham's family because he was Abraham's nephew. What we do see as we look into our history is that Ismael's descendants did play a part in the nation's history. This role is not one many people, even students of the Bible, often see or study, but it's there. Then clearly we see, in our modern time, Ismael's descendants have played a major role in the lives of Israel as they chose to follow a false religion which grew to teach hatred for the chosen nation. Whether we see this as good or bad is not important. God fulfilled His promise to Hagar, and God is using the nation(s) which came from Ismael in order to work His ultimate plan to this very day.

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

fact, believe in the truth there is a God, but the problem lies in what we think God is. It seems to be way too easy for us to believe God is nothing more than a distant force of some kind. I have seen it far more often than I care to remember. People believe it is up to them to shape what we believe and how we live on the basis we know best how to make the Gospel message most appealing to our generation and time. It's as if we think God needs our help or that He is such an ambiguous power, it needs to be up to us to figure out how to use that power for good. The world over is filled with stories about how people are oppressed by some powerful being only because a hero brave enough to manipulate the powers that be has not yet arisen. The happily ever after of most of these stories has to do with that hero arising or some person having or finding the knowledge it takes to accomplish what needs to be done to free themselves, others, or simply bring life back to normal after a curse of some kind. The truth is, we don't want an all powerful God who created us. We want the power to get what we want to be within our hands, and the best way to make it seem that is true is to believe we just need the right knowledge or enough bravery to gain the control we want. The best way to hold on to the hope we can do this is to believe there are examples of other people who have shown it can be done, and what better way to have this than to revere and/or worship someone.

In Israel there would have been no greater person to put in such a place and call the god of their culture than Moses! For all the times he had told them it was not him but God they needed to look to. For all the times Moses was actually upset by their murmuring to him as if it was all up to him instead of going to God themselves, they still did this. Almost everything God did for Israel, at least of those things that were spectacular and obvious, He did through Moses in some way. Nothing Moses could have said during his life could have persuaded Israel to not begin worshiping him as some form of a god at some point. In some ways it's hard even for people who study the Bible today not to see it that way in some facet. That's why God told Moses, and it was made clear to the nation, he was not even worthy of the high honor they were going to be given of going into the land. Moses was the last great example of the generation that had been full adults at the time the nation came out of Egypt and which was to die in the wilderness without seeing the land due to unbelief. Thus, this had great impact on the nation that he too was not allowed to enter. This would greatly dampen the nation's immediate urge to make him a god. That truth would go on to greatly dampen the next generation's urge to do such a thing. After that, the direct knowledge of who Moses was personally, and certainly those who had actually witnessed what he did for the nation, would have faded and died off. While they would always read about him in the pages of the Torah, they would live with the knowledge he had never been revered as a god, was not to be revered as such, and that God had not even allowed him to enter the promised land. This is why God would go the extra mile of not allowing even Moses' body to be taken into the land. They would not even know where he was buried and so there would be no shrines to build over his grave no matter where that might have been.

Next, we are given facts which tell us Moses was also

living a miraculous life in that his body had not aged. Remember, again, that Israel wandered in the wilderness for the purpose of allowing the generation that did not trust in God to die off. Moses was part of this older decision making generation to be sure! The fact everyone God intended to die for that purpose had died by the time God calls them out to go around to this east side of the Dead Sea and Jordan, makes it amazing that Moses was still alive. However, the fact he was showing no sign of old age was a miracle to be sure. This would be another point in taking Moses home here and now. This kind of miracle survival of Moses would have needed to continue in order for Moses to lead the nation as Joshua went on to do in taking the promised land. If this had happened, it would have heightened the nation's thoughts about revering Moses as a god. Instead, what the nation would see is that there was no reason for Moses to die due to old age, yet his life would come to an end because God said it was time.

Another fact in all this is that it truly was Moses' time! We are told Moses was 120 years old. This is the age God capped man's age at during the flood of Noah's day. God had determined that no man needed to live in this life of sin for hundreds of years, and while some experienced longer than 120 years just after the flood, we see the ages drop until it stabilized under this mark. Moses was well into a generation of people who were living with this truth having taken firm hold, and he had made it to the upper limit. We should also keep in mind that one of the reasons God said 120 would be the upper limit is because no person who serves God should have to live in this world of sin for longer than that. If we have lived for God, we have either grown to be so close to God and heavenly minded we are of no real earthly good or we are still struggling to walk with God in this world. If the first one is the case, it is pointless for us to continue this earthly experience any longer than God capped the years at, if even that long. If we are the second, we have truly fought the fight, and in spite of our mistakes, we have run the race. We have had our time to show what the desire of our heart is, and it's time to receive our eternal reward.

Moses was at this age, and it was a far greater blessing for him to get to be out of the struggles he had faced for so many years of having to carry the burden of this nation on his back than it would be to enter the promised land. Moses no doubt hoped to get there because it was the promise of God, and God respects that in showing him the land before he dies. Moses no doubt also looked forward to settling down and getting a break from all this work so he might live in peace upon the land. However, what awaited Moses on the other side of death was/is so much more than the promised land could ever have hoped to give; Moses would never lament not getting to enter the promised land once he was with God! What Moses mostly worried about was the nation itself, and the children of Israel would weep for Moses too at this point. They would spend 30 days mourning his death, but once that was over it was time to get on with the business at hand. That business was the job that had been put off for forty years now. Thus, what we see next is a rare example of a ministry work, which God had given to one man, needing to be passed on directly to another.

I say directly because God had chosen Moses for the

task not of just leading the children of Israel out of Egypt but also into the promised land. It did not work out that way and that was not Moses' fault or God's! However, it became necessary for another man to be given the work to finish, and if we look at what this means, we should see that Joshua did not get whatever work would have been his had this not happened. What might that have been? Only God knows the answers to such questions, but what is clear is that if Moses had been able to lead the people into the promised land forty years prior to this event, Moses would have had plenty of time to complete the work we see Joshua do before his death. Even if the nation had not accomplished in Moses' lifetime all of what they did under Joshua, the circumstances of what would have happened next would definitely have been much different. Since only God knows what He would have called Joshua to do, we only know it did not happen. Due to the nation's sin Joshua had to inherit the ministry of Moses to finish the task.

The other prominent example of this happening is when Elisha took over for Elijah. (I Kin. 19:9-21, II Kin. 2:1-15) This was not a case where Elijah had come to the age it was time for him to leave this world, but he had come to a place where God felt he had made as much progress as he could in his faith while walking this earth. God would take Elijah home for that reason, but Elijah's ministry work was not finished. What we are shown in the story is that Elisha had such a desire to do what Elijah had done, he asked for a double portion of the Spirit that was on Elijah to fill him. I think the same kind of thing can be said of Joshua. In spite of the fact Joshua's life would have been different had he not needed to take over where Moses left off, Joshua had been by Moses' side from the beginning. It was a long journey, but he never stopped wanting to be there. This made him the perfect person to take over Moses' work. He knew what he was getting himself into, so to speak. He had seen what Israel had done, how they had reacted to various situations. He had seen this in the generation that died in the wilderness, and he had been here to witness those of the next grow up and become the adults. This made him more personally knowledgeable of the people than Moses had been, at least to start out with. I'm sure this was an asset, but more importantly, if Joshua had gained and kept the respect of the people all these years, surely that was not going to change anytime soon.

That is basically what the closing verses here in Deuteronomy tell us. The same Spirit that had been on Moses was now on Joshua, and the people listen to him in following the instructions God had given. However, the very closing verses of this book go back to point out there has not been a prophet in Israel since Moses who was anything like him. Only Moses knew God face to face as he did. Only Moses showed as many signs and wonders as he did. Only Moses presided over such great works and events that they terrified the nation. Now these might sound like they mostly came from someone after Moses' death wanting to write a tribute to Moses, but they are not. You can believe that if you want, but these words were given by God in the same way the rest of the words of the Torah were. It is not important that Moses was not the one to write

these very last words, this is how God wanted the book and Moses' life to end. It was true at the time and would continue to be true. In reading the rest of the Bible we can see there was never again anyone like Moses. It would not be until God Himself came down as a man there would be a man greater in the power of God than Moses. What a thought and tribute, yet it needs to be remembered, Moses was still only a man as we all are. His mission put him in a unique situation and caused several miracles to be performed through him that no one else would ever need to be worked through them.

However, what the life of Moses shows us is that any of us can live a life this close to God. How can we know that? Because it was never about just the job Moses had to do, it was about his willingness to yield to God in order to get the work done that was important. This willingness can cause us to be used in spectacular ways, but in the end the work that it accomplishes for the Kingdom of God is all that is important. What we have between us and God is of much greater personal relevance, and that's what faith is all about. It is appropriate that the Torah ends with the death of Moses not just in that he wrote these first five books. Not even because it is the clear core of God's Word, but because with Moses we see what brought man from the creation to the point of God building a nation through whom He would work throughout the rest of this earth's history. The die had been cast, so to speak. Man had been created and man had chose how he was going to live. Upon seeing this, God had chosen how He would deal with that truth. Here Israel stood on the brink of the promised land ready to take their place on that land and among the true nations of the world. The stage was set, and God would never stop using this nation of people to work through.

Coming to the end of the Torah and its review means that next time we will be ready to begin our look at the history books of the Bible, and we will talk much, I am sure, about how they are that simple history of showing us the ways in which the nation and the world unfolded living under the circumstances we see put in place by the end of the Torah. Times will always change or seem to. Knowledge will increase, and many times it is forgotten and then has to be regained. Nations and rulers of nations will come and go throughout time, but the Words of God will never change. These first five books show us all what we really need to know about what God wants of us as humans. We can debate and argue over the details of particular things, but the overall view should be clear. If it is not then let me answer the question so many have over and over, which is, where should I start reading the Bible, a little different than just the obvious of, at the beginning. Keep reading just the Torah over and over in order to absorb it more thoroughly before you go on. In it is the perspective to understand not just the rest of the Word of God but life as a whole. If we immerse ourselves in it we can find a perspective on life that is unclouded by all the hustle and bustle of our modern world and time. The Torah is not old, it is the clear view of life and the existence of it. Make it a point to emphasize your knowledge and understanding of it always!

Let's stay in God's Word!

